

*Remarks as delivered by
Consul General Jake Walles
in Nablus on November 14, 2007.*

Mr. Prime Minister, Governor, Ministers, Mr. Chief Justice, Howard Sumka from USAID, friends, thank you very much for this warm welcome to Nablus today.

I want to congratulate Prime Minister Fayyad and his government for their recent steps here in Nablus to improve the daily life of the people and the surrounding area.

Nablus has long been the commercial and economic engine of the northern West Bank. Recent years have seen a decline in economic activity and an increase in lawlessness. I am pleased that recent actions by the PA have begun to change this situation for the better, and significant improvements are already visible here on the streets of the city.

As a result of these actions, the United States is now in a position to inaugurate a number of new projects in cooperation with the Palestinian Authority to improve the lives of people here in Nablus.

Today I am very pleased to announce the immediate implementation of the following projects:

The US Agency for International Development, USAID, under the leadership of Howard Sumka, will implement projects to improve public services provided by the Palestinian Authority. These include the construction of the Irak al Tayeh girls' school, the clean-up of several other selected public schools around the city, the refurbishment of this Public Notary Office here, and the renovation of the offices of the Ministry of Transportation.

In addition, the Office of Public Diplomacy of the Department of State will implement a number of projects with a special focus on youth. They will work with Palestinian NGOs and the Ministries of Education and Youth and Sports to begin a pilot after-school activity for Nablus youth, to create a Community Learning Center, to provide art expression classes for public school students, and to offer media internships for Nablus youth.

In addition to improving public services and increasing opportunities for youth, these projects will also help create jobs for the residents of Nablus.

The U.S. government will fund these projects amounting to more than \$1.3 million dollars. Some of these projects have already begun in the past days. All of the others will begin in a matter of weeks.

The U.S. government is committed to helping the Palestinian people achieve peace and security, and to build the institutions of a stable, free and prosperous Palestinian state living in peace with its neighbors. Our work is advancing on three tracks: economic, security and political.

We look ahead to the Annapolis international meeting, where we hope to make progress on the political track by launching negotiations for the establishment of a Palestinian state.

I agree with the Prime Minister that Nablus is more important than Annapolis. We are going to work on both of them.

You've heard President Bush and Secretary Rice talk about their intention to make progress towards the goal of establishment of a Palestinian state. We hope to make progress on this while President Bush remains in office. As Secretary Rice said recently: "We believe the time is now for the establishment of a Palestinian state."

These projects we are launching today are just one tangible step on the pathway to this objective.

Mr. Prime Minister, I hope that the progress that you have achieved in Nablus can be expanded to other parts of the West Bank, and also to Gaza. And I hope to be able to join you and your colleagues in other Palestinian cities and villages and refugee camps where we can continue our cooperation together for the benefit of the Palestinian people.

Shukran jazeelan.